

Between the Lines

July 2026

Welcome to our latest 'Between the Lines' edition – with a snap shot of some fantastic events that have happened across our community rail family.

Holton Heath event

The 110th anniversary of the opening of Holton Heath station (Purbeck CRP) was commemorated back in April. The station, located between remote heathland and farmland, opened on April 3, 1916, to serve the cordite factory next to it. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty at the time, instigated the construction of the factory to supply cordite to the Royal Navy. The station opened to the public on July 14, 1924.

The anniversary event included a talk on the opening of the cordite factory, celebration cake and refreshments, and the unveiling of a blue plaque to mark the opening of the station.

Prizes were also presented to the winners of a poster competition for pupils of Sandford St Martin's Primary School by Dorset Council chair Cllr Stella Jones.

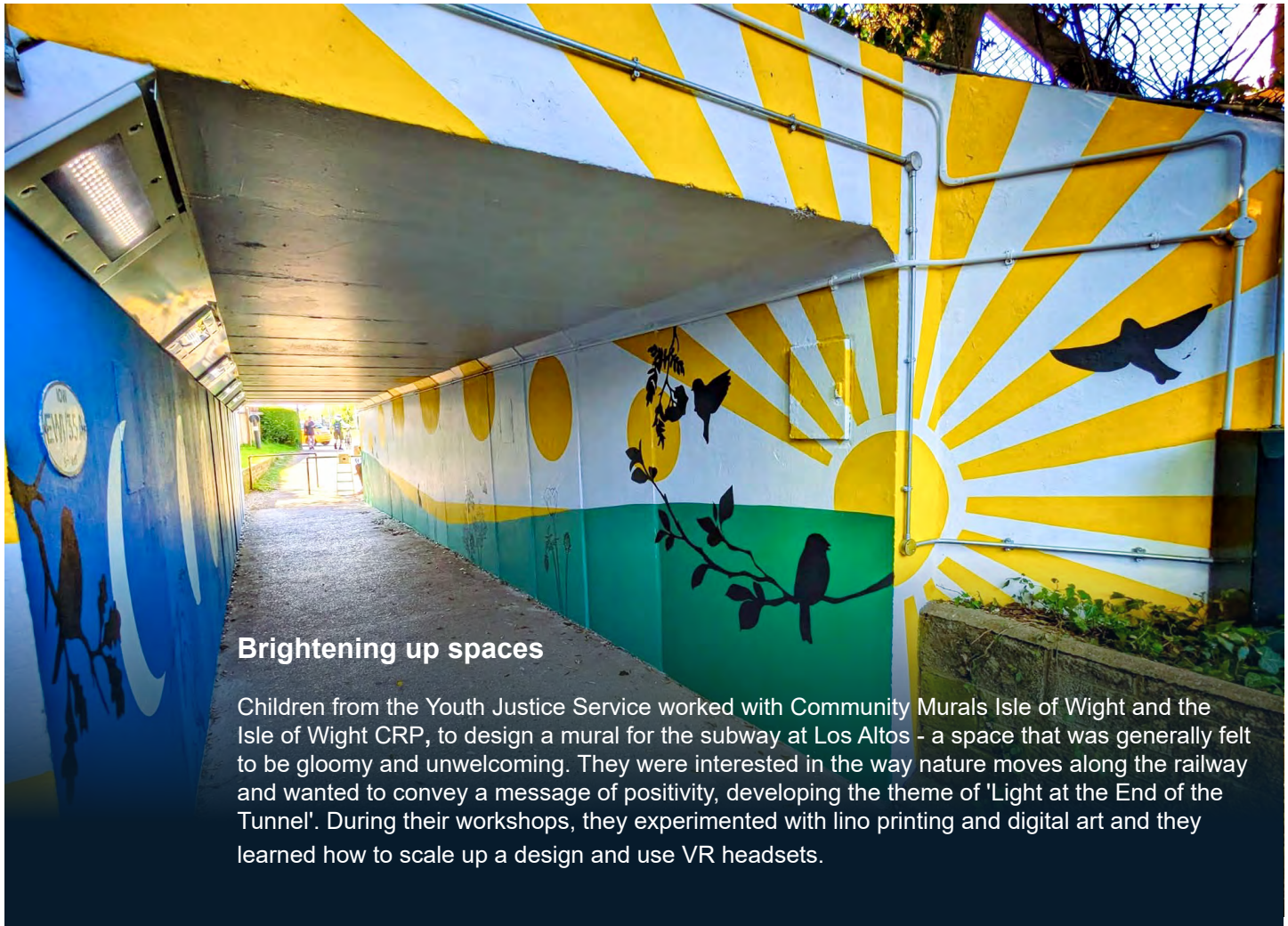


Off to the Castle

Sandy, officer for the Reading to Windsor CRP, met friends from the Afghan Women's Group in Staines and boarded a train to Windsor & Eton Riverside. After a short walk to Windsor Castle they saw the Changing of the Guard ceremony before entering the castle, viewing the State Rooms and enjoying a delicious lunch.

Many of the women said they didn't realise how simple train travel could be. A consistent theme in their feedback was how safe, comfortable, and included they felt throughout the day. They said they felt confident to return to Windsor on their own.

Claudine, the ladies support worker, said "I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank you for such a fantastic day out in Windsor. The women have been absolutely glowing about the experience and asked me to pass on their gratitude to you. On a personal note, it meant so much to spend time with the women in a different setting from my usual role. Seeing them so relaxed, laughing, and enjoying themselves so freely was incredibly special. It really filled me with joy. Thank you again for organising such meaningful opportunities. They genuinely make a lasting difference to the community".



Brightening up spaces

Children from the Youth Justice Service worked with Community Murals Isle of Wight and the Isle of Wight CRP, to design a mural for the subway at Los Altos - a space that was generally felt to be gloomy and unwelcoming. They were interested in the way nature moves along the railway and wanted to convey a message of positivity, developing the theme of 'Light at the End of the Tunnel'. During their workshops, they experimented with lino printing and digital art and they learned how to scale up a design and use VR headsets.

Horsley annual event

Our winners of the Railway200 SWR award last year once again put on a real community affair, with several volunteer community groups exhibiting including East and West Parish Councils and the newly formed Heritage Group. The sun was shining and live piano music was enjoyed by all!



Celebrating Indian heritage

The Friends of Ashurst – New Forest, have built a lasting Memorial to the British and Indian soldiers who were camped by the station in World War 1.

The idea came from local volunteer Nick, who had spent time researching the Indian army based throughout the New Forest during the First World War as part of his university dissertation.

Nick was able to supply various stories and images, taken at the time the army was based here. Artillery pieces would be transferred from Woolwich Arsenal in London by train to Ashurst New Forest Station (then known as Lyndhurst Road Station).

The community group were able to fund raise the monies to build the planter, supply soil, plants and a Magnolia tree (a native plant in India).



Lawrence out on the network

We were delighted to have Lawrence Bowman (Managing Director SWR/NR Wessex) out on the network to visit our Community Rail family. With visits to Witley to meet the Green Hub, Haslemere and the newly required signal box and museum, and finally to Hilsea to hear about Jane's (Community Spotlight) plans for the old ticket office building and the station – Lawrence had a busy day but felt “truly uplifted”

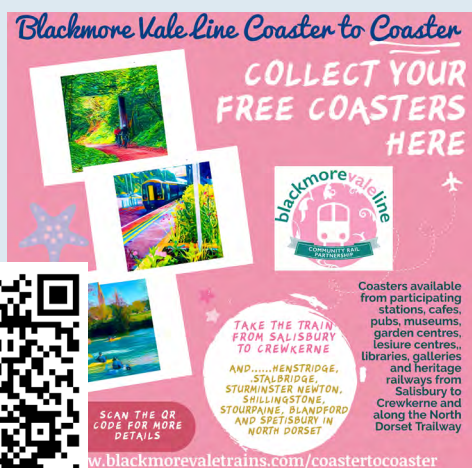


Community Rail Week

To kick off Community Rail Week, we hosted a Rail Study Network event in the newly refurbished ticket office at Surbiton station. The event saw around 50 external stakeholders attend and hear about Community Rail on the SWR network, with a guided tour of the station by the Friends of Surbiton and treated to some delicious food from Manny's Community Kitchen Roots based at Tolworth station.

Following the theme of 'Journeys for All', Mikey lead a wellbeing walk travelling from Basingstoke station and Caroline from Blackmore Vale CRP launched her 'Coaster to Coaster' project, which is a fun activity following treasure trails round some of our great destinations.

There are 91 different coasters to collect from over 90 venues of our great partners along the Balckmore Vale line. Why not join in the fun this summer?



Popping over to Polly's

The Autism Trust are up and running at Camberley station, with a grand opening of their small outlet 'Polly's Place', and their practice living quarters – teaching their members valuable life skills. Well done to Mo and her team for their perseverance.





Thames Ditton in Bloom

Local volunteers who tend to the gardens on Thames Ditton Station have celebrated their 10-year anniversary with a special community event.

To mark the milestone, volunteers from Thames Ditton in Bloom, a sub-section of the Thames Ditton Foundation, brought the community together to unveil a permanent art installation in the passenger shelter at the station

The art installation traces the evolution of the garden from its founding in 2016 by local resident and lead volunteer Tricia, coinciding with the Queen's 90th birthday.

The artwork, supported by SWR and Surrey County Council, features specially commissioned paintings and illustrations by four talented local artists who have been closely associated with the Thames Ditton in Bloom community garden throughout the decade – Lisa Tolley, Andrea Cunningham, Charlotte Bramley and Val Rowe.

Armed Forces Day

Wey Valley CRP helped celebrate Armed Forces Day, which was held in Aldershot this year. Vibrant murals were installed at the station in collaboration with the pupils from the local Alderwood School. They were admired by all that came through the station on that day.



Munsty's day service

Purbeck CRP organised an outing from Weymouth to Swanage for members of the Munsty's Community Based Learning and Activities Men's Group. Munsty's offers a day service for adults with additional support needs or learning disabilities who wish to develop their independence.

The party consisted of 14 group members and support workers who are part of the partnership's 'travel with confidence' programme.

The journey involved mainline train travel to Wareham, supported by Andrew Lamport, SWR Community Ambassador, bus travel to Corfe Castle and then a visit to the Swanage Heritage Railway. The idea was to involve multi-modal travel integration following a timetable and planned itinerary.



Godalming in Bloom Awards

Congratulations to the Friends of Farncombe station who were presented with "The Waverley Trophy" at the Godalming in Bloom Awards. The group also received a number of private appreciations from people who said things like "I really appreciate the station every time I take the train"



Cllr. Peter Harman

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Cllr. Peter Harman from Weybridge St George's Hill Ward, and an active member of our community rail family at Weybridge station. We would like to recognise all his hard work and dedication in brightening up the station environment and our thoughts are with his family and colleagues at this difficult time.



Thank you from Community Rail Network

The last few months have been a whirlwind of activity in the south, my feet have hardly touched the ground! First of all, thanks so much to everyone who got involved with Community Rail Week in June. It was our biggest yet, with over 150 events taking place across the country. The week raised the profile of community rail and highlighted its vital role in creating more inclusive, accessible journeys. From steam trains in Swanage to art on the Isle of Wight, it was wonderful to see you all showcasing your brilliant work.

Congratulations must also go to the Friends of Haslemere Station, who hosted the grand opening of their signal box and museum last month, and to the wonderful Green Hub at Witley who celebrated their 5th birthday with a lovely garden party at the station.

It's been a busy time at Community Rail Network too – we have welcomed Chris Birks as our new Director of Policy and Comms, and Bill Freeman will be returning as our new CEO in August. This year we have already supported about 20 new projects across the SWR region, including Rowland's Castle refurbishment, station events, art, planters and much more. We also have a full programme of training and networking events for all our members. If you've got a project idea you want to discuss, please get in touch!

Jenni Jones, Member Support Officer, England South

J.jones@communityrail.org.uk

